

# 2013 State of the City Address

Mayor Harvey Johnson, Jr.

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Smith Robertson Museum

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Good Afternoon,

Thank you Reverend Young for that invocation. Council members, friends, family, supporters, staff and citizens, thank you for joining me today for the last State of the City Address of my 3<sup>rd</sup> term as Mayor of the City of Jackson. It was twenty years ago that I announced my candidacy for mayor of Jackson for the very first time right here at Smith Robertson Museum.

This facility is so significant because it is named after the first African American Alderman of Jackson, and now serves as a facility dedicated to the legacy of the African American experience in Jackson and in Mississippi.

Artifacts and exhibits share history, express our struggle and celebrate the artistic expression of a people. The museum is a jewel and it remains as a vessel of understanding, not just for the few, but for everyone.

I'm so honored to stand before you today as a public servant who has dedicated over four decades to using whatever skills, knowledge, wisdom and experience God has allowed me to gain, to do my part in working to make the lives of others better.

Indeed, when you have faith in God and trust in Him with all your heart, he will guide your path. And God has put so many individuals along my path who've worked just as hard, been just as dedicated and who've prayed with me and for me and this City. I want to take just a moment and thank each of you.

Of course no other individual has had more faith in me and the important work we've done together to make our Capital City and the lives of her citizens better than my wife, Kathy. Being mayor is a 24-7, 365 day a year job, and I simply could not have done it without Kathy. Words simply fail me to express the extent of my love and appreciation for her over these past 44 years - but being your husband, Kathy, has been and still is what brings me the greatest joy of my life.

Today I not only come to offer a progress report on our efforts over the past year, but I also want to talk about the foundation that my administration has constructed and reinforced that we will soon pass on to the next Mayor.

The work for the citizens of Jackson is vitally important and this work never ends – regardless of the inhabitant in City Hall. We all have a part to play and I pray that we all continue to use whatever means, resources, and talents we possess to continue to move our city forward.

And speaking of work, I must commend our City of Jackson Employees who come to work for Jackson each and every day. Whether they are serving and protecting in the Police Department, or Public Works crews who fix potholes, broken water lines and so much more, our employees serve our citizens each and every day at all hours of the day and night. We appreciate you all so much.

We also have a remarkable and talented team of Department Directors who have provided direction and have helped us carry out various programs, projects and initiatives, while doing an excellent job in managing their respective budgets – all with the best interests of the citizens of Jackson in everything they do. At this time I'd like to recognize the Chief of Staff, Department Directors, Deputy Directors,

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Mayor's Office Staff and Chief Administrator's Office Staff and ask them to stand. Thank each of you for the work you have done for the citizens of Jackson.

Ladies and gentlemen, I've said it before, but I'll say it again: We put the City of Jackson Back on Track to Move Ahead, and the State of our City is better now, due to this important work we've done over the past four years.

During this time, our city has faced some unprecedented challenges. We've faced a national recession. We've battled with an aging infrastructure. We had outdated internal systems that needed to be upgraded to provide better service to our citizens and employees. We continuously focused on providing a solid, responsible foundation that included our core mission to be fiscally responsible with taxpayer dollars; to always put the needs of the citizens (every citizen) of Jackson first; to continue to improve upon services and service delivery; to cut out waste and improve efficiency; to continue to upgrade our aging infrastructure steadily and without over-burdening the citizen with the cost; and perhaps most importantly, to commit to not putting these challenges off for someone else to address.

My administration has presented a balanced budget each of the last four years that did not include a tax increase. None of them called for the lay-off of city employees or any furloughs of staff. And all four of my previous budgets built upon the success of the prior year and addressed the ongoing challenges that we've faced systematically and incrementally. We have lived within our means and we have cut waste, cut overtime and improved efficiency.

I have directed staff to craft a balanced budget draft that will remain flat, include no tax increases, contain no layoffs and continue to make provisions for the important ongoing projects and initiatives for this next budget year. I will be providing this budget draft to the incoming administration in the coming weeks.

Over the past year we were again recognized for our excellent financial management by the Government Finance Officers Association. In fact, we've been recognized every year during my administration.

Our sales tax collections are, in fact, growing. This continues to exemplify the strong foundation of economic development and of our pro-business efforts.

And recent census numbers show that our population has started to trend upward.

We've also built upon our foundation of improving technology all across the City of Jackson over the past year. We're in the middle of implementing Phase II of the 311 system that will give residents greater ease in reporting service requests by using their cell phone and other mobile devices. It will immediately tie work orders to a service requests and city workers will get the work orders in the field, cutting down on time. Since we implemented 311 in April 2011, over 70,000 citizens have used the system with a 93% clearance rate.

We're also completing the installation of our Time Management system, Kronos. Employees are currently using the Kronos system parallel with the old system while we test and make any needed adjustments. This technology is going to dramatically cut down on overtime, and it will ensure that employees are being paid for the time they work within the appropriate work period.

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We're implementing a court management system that will completely automate many of our Municipal Court Service Operations, bringing better efficiency, accountability and convenience to our citizens.

We've installed Automatic Vehicle Locators on part of our city fleet to regulate routes, to cut out waste, and improve efficiency, with the goal of eventually employing this system in the City's entire rolling stock.

We've also continued to focus on improving our infrastructure in every part of our city. We've built upon the solid foundation we've already made in improving our water and sewer systems. Since 1997, we have spent about \$250 million on both systems. This year, we completed the final phase of the 54-inch water line project, and now the two water treatment plants are connected. This will greatly enhance water delivery to our total system.

We constructed a five million water tank down on T.V. Road, installed some 28 inch water lines and are constructing a booster station, as well as installed 48 inch water lines from the Fewell plant to South Jackson. These projects will allow us to remove citizens from the less efficient well system in the southwest section of our service area.

We are replacing major water lines under Capitol Street and we are constructing a 1 million gallon elevated water tank at the corner of Mill Street and Fortification Street. These projects will provide better water supply to our Capitol Complex, Downtown and parts of West Jackson.

These upgrades that I've mentioned aren't always the most glamorous projects, and they almost never get any fanfare, but they are some of the most important work that we've done this past year. These integral improvements to our system are going to ensure that our water delivery is adequate for all citizens, and should prevent a major problem like we had in 2010.

By the way ladies and gentlemen, we have great water quality here in the City of Jackson. We pull about 100,000 samples single year from every single part of our water system and send these samples to the lab at the Mississippi Department of Health where they are tested. Just this month, the Health Department issued its annual report and the City of Jackson scored 4.7 out of 5 in terms of water quality.

We also crafted a \$90 million performance contract that is currently being financed and work should begin this summer to replace major sewer lines across our city, to replace about 60,000 water meters with new automatic water meters; and to install a new state of the art water billing system that will allow residents to see their water usage in real time; and we will be making upgrades to our two water treatment plants. This is perhaps the largest public works project in our city's history and not only will it pay for itself, but it's going to improve our water and wastewater systems dramatically.

Of course the City of Jackson is now under a consent decree with the U.S. Department of Justice and Environmental Protection Agency to improve our sewer system over the next 17.5 years at an estimated cost of \$400 million. And it is estimated that we need to do about \$500 million in upgrades to our water system over the next twenty years. We've laid the foundation of sustained, incremental improvements to both the water and sewer systems by having independent evaluations of both systems done by engineering experts. We now have an updated long range plan for each system, detailing what upgrades need to be done first. This roadmap will certainly assist future administrations who must continue working on this issue.

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Improving our roads is an ongoing challenge, but one we've also been able to make some good progress addressing. We've repaved over 87 miles of road using proceeds from the \$26 million bond issue. We've also been able to repave 27 additional residential streets, as well as 25 major intersections. Right now we have about \$25 million in additional road projects going on or soon to be kicked off, including Fortification Street, West Street, Lynch Street, Jessie Mosley Drive extension, Capitol Street, and the four-laning of West County Line Road. And we're currently repairing about 500 utility cuts across the city. And every day we repair potholes. In fact our goal is to repair any reported pothole within 72 hours, which has been our policy for about a decade. So if you see a pothole, please call 311 and report it.

I also have proposed and Council approved the resolution for a \$10 million general obligation bond issue to pave major thoroughfares, spending at least \$1 million in each ward. My request to proceed with issuing those bonds was tabled by the City Council, but it is my hope that this issue will move forward, because this money could make a major impact right away all across Jackson.

The Fire Department has purchased seven new trucks that will be deployed strategically in fire stations across the city. They have four rescue vehicles and three ladder trucks that will arrive in a few weeks. A mobile command vehicle is also on order that can be used for mass casualty incidents such as large fires, severe weather incidents, hazardous materials incidents and even acts of terror.

The Fire Department will be holding promotional exams for Lieutenants, Captains and District Chiefs in the coming months. It is important that we continue to build upon the foundation we've made in the Fire Department. I commend Chief Raymond McNulty for advocating for and administering a clear career path for our firefighters.

These and other projects are so important in maintaining our Class 3 Fire Insurance rating, which remains the best in the State of Mississippi.

The Jackson Police Department has made important strides in combatting and preventing crime in the Capital City. We all know that crime fighting efforts are never complete; however, our Police Department continues to invest in new tools and has employed new strategies that are proving to be very effective.

Last year we decentralized the Police Department, deploying the vice and narcotics unit, as well as the property crimes unit to the Precincts.

We established the Direct Action Response Team (DART) which is sent to crime hotspots all over the city. We also expanded beats in Precincts one and four.

JPD has been awarded nearly \$30 million in grants over the last several years to purchase important equipment such as mobile in-car video cameras which are in 170 police vehicles, 230 laptops that are in police vehicles, automatic license plate readers, handheld speech translators, the SkyCop mobile cadet, as well as bullet proof vests and other equipment for officers.

The department also re-implemented the DUI Unit with five officers and five fully equipped DUI vehicles.

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We've also focused on putting more officers on the streets of Jackson. Just last month a recruit class graduated. They are now assigned to an experienced officer in the precincts for field training. We've added 135 new police officers on the force over the past several years and have hired 37 additional experienced officers. And JPD will conduct promotional exams for sergeants and lieutenants in the next 60 to 90 days.

Under the leadership of Police Chief Rebecca Coleman, our crime fighting efforts have produced a decrease in overall crime. To date this year, we have a 16.4 percent decrease in overall crime, when compared to last year.

We've worked with other agencies partnering on the scourge of violent crime, developing prevention and intervention strategies. In fact, we have joined in with other major cities to develop strategies to combat violent crimes and homicides under an initiative called Cities United.

We've also partnered with Crime Stoppers to get guns out of the hands of felons, which is yielding some good results. This effort came about as the result of a JPD Command Staff visit to Charlotte/Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, where such a program is on-going and is very successful.

Our jobs for Jacksonians program has put hundreds of Jackson residents to work. Since we launched the program about two years ago, we've conducted several job fairs attended by nearly 8,000 job seekers.

And on June 12<sup>th</sup>, we'll be having a Jackson Utility Management Project Jobs Fair for Jacksonians who are seeking employment in the IT and construction fields. Contractors who will be working as part of the \$90 million Infrastructure Performance Contract will be hiring. This is the largest public works project in Jackson's history, a lot of money is going to be spent upgrading Jackson's water and sewer systems -- **and Jacksonians should be hired to do this work!**

We're also employing hundreds of youth this summer in the Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program. A few years ago we hired a couple of hundred young people with the City, but we set about to involve the private sector; and year after year, we've built upon our success and private sector participation has gone up. Over 1,000 young people have secured jobs over the past three summers and this summer our goal is to get 625 more hired.

The Department of Human and Cultural Services continues to provide meals, transportation and programming to our senior citizens. Each year more than 50,000 seniors receive hot nutritious meals and 30,000 trips to the doctor's office or other appointments are provided to this very special population.

Nearly 300 Jackson Pre-K students in the City's Early Childhood Development Centers are participating in a College Savings Account Program that was recently featured on PBS television. We have 2,500 Pre-K and kindergarten students benefitting from our Healthy Communities Initiatives.

And we have continued to address blight across Jackson. We revamped our Community Improvement Division and cases are moving more quickly. We're very pleased that we are beginning to recoup some of the taxpayer dollars that we are forced to spend cleaning many of these properties. This is thanks to legislation we lobbied for several years ago that allows us to put the cost of cleanup and/or demolition on the tax bills of the property owners.

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We instituted a Neighborhood Listening Tour Program where city staff rides along with members of various neighborhood associations, who show us their concerns, voice their ideas and talk with us on how we can assist them in improving their neighborhoods. City staff then develops an action plan to address improvements. This has been very effective, and we have had nine such tours since the fall of 2012, with two additional tours planned.

We've continued to build a solid foundation of economic development activities across Jackson. We've provided well over \$800,000 to small businesses through our grant programs that have retained or created nearly 900 jobs for our citizens.

We've issued an average of 1,000 business licenses every year for the past three years and we are on track to meet that number again this year.

The City of Jackson works with developers on a daily basis to develop and redevelop properties in the Capital City. The value of our building permits issued is now over \$900 million since 2009. This is a great testament to the faith that businesses and developers have had in our city.

A prime example is the \$80 million District at Eastover project. The city just agreed to provide up to \$7 million in incentive financing – and construction will begin this fall. The development which will be located at the old site of the MS School for the Blind will include retail, restaurants, office space, a hotel, residential space, elevated parking, and a movie theatre.

We've seen a lot of redevelopment along the I-55 North Corridor, such as the \$5.1 million investment made by Virginia College. Comcast, CarMax, Phil Moore Buick GMC, Great Northern Tools and Save A Lot also made investments along I-55. While J.D. Byrider and Twin Peaks Restaurant have facilities that are under construction.

The Whole Foods Market construction is well underway in Highland Village. That \$3 million facility will be the first of its company stores in Mississippi.

The Iron Horse Grill downtown broke ground this year and is under construction. This celebrated establishment will get a whole new treatment, and will include the Iron Horse Grill restaurant and a live music venue in a 12,000 square foot facility. The building will also house the Mississippi Music Experience.

The medical office building project on State Street is nearing completion of the first phase of this mixed-use, \$57 million project that includes retail, office, residential units and parking.

The Westin Hotel in downtown was recently announced, and is rapidly moving toward reality.

And ladies and gentlemen, the City of Jackson has been approached by a hotel developer who is proposing to build a Convention Center Hotel. We have been in serious negotiations and since we've been able to acquire the land back from the developer who bought it six years ago, we are closer than ever to getting a Convention Center Hotel. And we're working with the Jackson Redevelopment Authority to make these two very significant hotel projects a reality.

We've also developed a Market Profile for Jackson which we share with possible developers. In fact, we've put together a package that we've sent to COSTCO in hopes of securing a store for the Capital

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City. And it looks like discussions with Wal-Mart could result in the location of its “neighborhood store” model here in our city.

Our economic development efforts have consistently been lauded over the past four years by national media outlets such as CNN Money, Kiplinger’s, The Huffington Post and others. The fact that Jackson weathered a national recession and still was able to boast million and millions of dollars in economic development projects year after year is a testament to the solid foundation we’ve laid.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have about 150 major public works projects under construction or in some stage of development. We have another 50 initiatives, programs and special projects that are underway and in development, as well as several major economic development proposals and plans that staff is working on. I will be producing, along with a balanced budget draft, a transition document for the next administration detailing these projects and providing all relevant information to carry them forward. My pledge is to make the process of transition as helpful as possible.

My administration and the team I’ve assembled have worked each and every day for the betterment of Jackson, and to improve the lives of every single Jacksonian. We have built a strong foundation over the past four years that I’m certain the next administration can build upon. We’ve planted a lot of seeds with major projects, developments, and important initiatives, and it is so vital that we do not allow those seeds to lay fallow.

My fellow citizens, the City of Jackson is at a unique place in History. Twenty years ago, I ran for mayor, just 30 years after the height of the Civil Rights Movement and the death of Medgar Evers. And today, fifty years after his death, we come together as a city with his legacy celebrated within these very walls.

We must not let Medgar Evers’ work, or all those men and women who died so that we might all enjoy the same opportunities and advantages, be in vain. You know I’ve been fighting for our city for four decades in one way or another, both in and out of office. And the first thing you have to do to fight for something is to stand up for what you believe in. So ladies and gentlemen let’s stand up today...

Let’s stand up against the detractors when it concerns our city. Stand up to those who would divide us at any cost. Let’s stand up against those who feel the need to tear our city down.

Let’s stand up for our children and our public schools. Stand up for our senior citizens, our grandmothers and mothers. **Stand up ladies and gentlemen!** Stand up for safe neighborhoods, and a thriving business environment. Stand up for better jobs. Stand for our creative class and our working class and our young professionals.

Stand up for the cultural venues and attractions that bring 3 million people from across the state and around the globe to our city every year.

Stand up for Midtown and downtown and Georgetown and Virden Addition and Lake Trace and Sub Number 2 and Highway 80 and Belhaven and Fondren and Valley North.

Stand up for our men and women in the Police Department and the Fire Department getting up every day to put their lives on the line.

**It’s time to STAND Up, I say. Stand up for Jackson!**

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We all have a part to play in our community. We have unique and invaluable contributions we can make, even in the smallest way, to carry our city forward and to make it the greatest city we know she can be.

Government has its place, but government will never be able to fix every problem, nor should it. So get involved if you're not. Stay involved if you are— and stand up for Jackson **every day**.

I've had a love affair with this city and the wonderful citizens who inhabit it for over forty years. And in that time, I've seen some extraordinary things – some truly amazing and some tragic— but the most profound thing and the strongest force I have ever experienced, and still experience right to this very day is the indelible and pervasive spirit of Jackson's people.

Jacksonians, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for allowing me to serve you. Through all the challenges and triumphs - the ups and downs – the peaks and valleys—I have always remained committed to each of you, and it has been humbling and truly life changing to come to work for you each and every day.

May God bless you and May God Bless the City of Jackson.